

Freedom and Responsibility

Day of Recollection

St. John Vianney Theological Seminary

January 10, 2000

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I. Introduction

- A. "Lord, by your cross and resurrection You have set us free,
You are the Savior of the world."
 - 1. From what does Jesus set us free?
 - a. From sin
 - b. From death
 - 2. How does he set us free?
 - a. By His Cross
 - b. By His Resurrection
 - 3. Why does He set us free if we are already free?
 - a. As created in the image and likeness of God
 - b. With free will ordered to the good
 - c. And intellect ordered to the true
 - d. Embodied and in communion with others
- B. Let us ponder this mystery together:
 - 1. as we consider what freedom is and what it is not
 - 2. where each one of us is free and where we are not
 - 3. how freedom is connected with responsibility
 - 4. and how time spent in seminary formation can come to be seen as a school of love, a school of freedom and responsibility

II. Context of freedom in Contemporary Secular Culture

A. Common language about freedom:

- 1. Right to free speech, freedom of movement, freedom of action, freedom of religion, freedom of choice (of job, of spouse, of place to live, of whether or not to bear a child), freedom of association
- 2. Right to freedom from tyranny, freedom from oppression, freedom from exploitation, freedom from slander, freedom from discrimination
- 3. President Clinton even proclaimed the year 2000 as a year of freedom.
- 4. The question is: what does 'freedom' mean, is it freedom of something, freedom from something, or freedom for something or someone?

B. Philosophical roots of some distorted contemporary understandings about freedom

- 1. J.S. Mill and William James suggested an individual freedom divorced from objective understanding of truth
- 2. Nietzsche, divorced freedom from objective truth and objective goodness
- 3. Jean Paul Sartre radicalized and divorced freedom from the reality of the present moment. (VS #32)
- 4. Others argued that human beings are not free, but rather caught in forces, so that freedom is simply an illusion, a feeling with no foundation in reality. (VS #33)

C. Into this maze of uses and abuses of the word "freedom" Catholic thought has articulated fundamental principles to which we now turn.

III. Principles of Freedom and Responsibility in Catholic Understanding

A. We have freedom of specification and freedom of exercise

1. God has given each of us the gift of free will- specified as an aspect of our human nature (VS #38)
 - a. This is the source of the dignity of the human person who can become master over his own acts (CCC#1730)
 - b. This is the source of the great dignity of the human person in relation to other persons in society (DH #1)
2. Freedom must be exercised for the full development of the person
 - a. Analogous examples:
 - i. exercising muscles for movement
 - ii. being set free from a concentration camp (Victor Frankl, MM 87-90)
 - b. We are responsible for exercising our will and grow in freedom (CCC #1731)
 - i. responsibility as ability to respond
 - ii. we may grow freer by choosing the good (CCC#1733)
 - a': e.g. choice to enter seminary formation leading to other goods
 - b': e.g. choices of personal conversion in area of weakness leading to greater depth of freedom of action in that area
 - c': e.g. expanding breadth of unfree areas to work on
 - iii. full freedom is gained by education and intentional action grounded in the truth (Maritain, EC, 10-12)
 - iv. The performing of an action is the actualization of the person (Wojtyla, AP 112)
 3. Our freedom of specification is a human potentiality contained in the act of soul and freedom of exercise is the way we actualize this gift of God over our life time (VS #39)

B. The human person experiences freedom

1. We experience the binding of commands and the free judgments of reason "I ought to do this"(ST, I, Q.83, art.1)
2. In the zone of "I may but I need not." (Wojtyla, AP, 100-101)
3. We are conscious of choosing "This here act" (Krapiec, IM, 189-91)
 - a. accompanying or mirroring knowledge
 - b. different from being coerced where something in us rebels

C. The free will is oriented towards the Good

1. It is a law of our existence that I am inclined to the good
 - a. Towards the last end or happiness
 - b. Beatitude of eternal life in union with God
2. It is a law of our nature that I am limited to a particular good
3. So the good I choose may not be the true good
 - a. There may be an error in judgment about the true good
 - b. The passions may sway the reason (ST I-II, Q. 10, art.3.)
4. In which case I often invent a "pseudo-will" reflecting a disordered passion:
 - a. e.g. seeking desire, pleasure, or avoiding pain, dislikes
"pseudo freedom to eat what I want when I want, to go where I want when I want, to say what I want to whom I want when I want, etc.
 - b. or avoiding out of fear, haranguing out of anger
5. The goals of human responsibility with respect to the will
 - a. to become self-governing in relation to the passions (CCC#1767 and 1804 and GS #17)
 - b. and to base choices on true judgments (VS salutation)

D. Freedom must be grounded in the Truth as discovered by the intellect

1. Man tends by nature towards the truth (CCC#2467)
2. The correct relation between freedom and truth is the fundamental moral question (VS #84)
3. The person is fulfilled when freedom is united with truth (Wojtyla, AP 175 and GS #15 and 17)
4. We discover truth through faith and through reason (FR Preface and #108)

E. Truth is discovered in relations of communion

1. The special place of conscience relation with God (GS #16)
 - a. Hears the natural law: do good and avoid evil (VS sel. #54,59)
 - b. Judges and chooses to act or not to act here and now in this specific way (CCC#1778 and 1780)
2. The goals of human responsibility with respect to the intellect- relations with others
 - a. To become educated about the truth of God's law through the Church (VS #35)
 - b. To educate one's conscience (CCC#1783)
 - c. To choose to obey the certain judgment of our conscience (CCC#1790 and VS #34)
 - d. To accept personal responsibility for every act directly willed (CCC#1736)

IV. The Seminary as a School of Freedom and Responsibility

- A. The communal character of vocation (CCC# 1878-1879)
 - 1. Dedicated to the common good (CCC#1905-1906)
 - 2. By responsibility and participation (CCC#1913-1917)
- B. The heroism of self-gift
 - 1. In "everyday saints" (CTH 180)
 - 2. By practising ways of giving of self to others, to study, to charges, to the horarium, by growing in virtue, we prepare for the ultimate gift of self to God at the moment of death
 - a. By analogy with a person whose physical body limits movement and even speech during a serious illness, but whose inner freedom has matured to perfection
 - b. The seminary formation can be freely chosen as a school of love, a place where freedom is exercised with increasingly greater responsibility
 - c. Preparing one for the final act of the greatest freedom, of gift of self to God when He is met face-to-face at the moment of death. (Krapiec, IM, 358-360)
- C. This impels us to return to consider our prayer at the beginning of our reflections: "Lord, by Your cross and resurrection You have set us free..."
 - 1. Jesus freely died to his human passions, wants, desires, to conform to his vocation, and by His death he set us free
 - 2. By imitation, a seminarian and priest may with Christ set others free
 - 3. But first there is a need to learn about those areas in one's personality in which one is still not free. Thus the value of a school for freedom and responsibility
- D. Conclude with a prayer of St. Ignatius (SE #234)
 - 1. Growth in freedom involves both hard work and prayer
 - 2. God gave us our gifts of intellect, will, community, and vocation
 - 3. In an exchange of love by giving back to God what He has given us, our school of freedom and responsibility can truly become a school of love.

Abbreviations

- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- DH *Dignitatis Humanae* (Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Liberty)
- MM Victor Frankl, *Modern Man's Search for Meaning*
- GS *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II, On the Church in the Modern World)
- SE Saint Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*
- CTH John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*
- VS John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendour*, On the Spendor of Truth
- IM M.A. Krapiec, *I-Man*
- EC Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*
- ST Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*
- AP Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*